

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 427 348

CS 509 979

AUTHOR Kruckeberg, Dean
TITLE The Need for an Enlarged Vision and Additional Perspectives of Public Relations in the 21st Century: A Challenge to Existing Paradigms.
PUB DATE 1998-11-23
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association (84th, New York, NY, November 21-24, 1998).
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Computer Uses in Education; Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Context; Education Work Relationship; Higher Education; Internet; Organizational Climate; *Public Relations; Relevance (Education); *Student Development; Technological Advancement
IDENTIFIERS Cultural Studies; Logical Positivism

ABSTRACT

This paper asserts that an enlarged vision and additional perspectives of public relations will be needed in the 21st century: vision and perspectives that will not only complement but challenge existing paradigms. Future communication technological phenomena will require dramatic changes in public relations practitioners' efforts in relationship- and community-building and will dramatically affect all areas of life in ways yet unknown. The journey into cyberspace will begin in the schools. Computerized education will prepare students for their lives of work and the computer can also be used to shape students' personalities to accommodate the workplace. Increasingly important will be public relations practitioners' attempts to foster "ritual" communication, a process through which a shared culture is created, modified, and transformed. While empirical studies using logical positivist methodologies will undoubtedly remain important in public relations research, real value will be added from their knowledge of cultural studies that will help contextualize meaning--to provide understanding. (Contains 11 references.) (CR)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

NATIONAL COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION

"THE NEED FOR AN ENLARGED VISION
AND ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF PUBLIC RELATIONS
IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
A CHALLENGE TO EXISTING PARADIGMS"

By Dr. Dean Kruckeberg, APR, Fellow PRSA
Professor and Coordinator,
Public Relations Degree Program
Department of Communication Studies
University of Northern Iowa
Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614-0357
U.S.A.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to
improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this
document do not necessarily represent
official OERI position or policy.

Presented in the Program:

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

D. Kruckeberg

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

Is Enactment a Paradigm Shift?:

A New Vision for Public Relations (3631)

3:30 to 4:40 p.m. Monday, Nov. 23, 1998
Room 534, Fifth Floor, New York Hilton

At the 84th Annual Meeting
Of the National Communication Association
New York Hilton/Marriott Marquis
New York, NY
Friday, Nov. 20, through Tuesday, Nov. 24, 1998

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"THE NEED FOR AN ENLARGED VISION
AND ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF PUBLIC RELATIONS
IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
A CHALLENGE TO EXISTING PARADIGMS"

INTRODUCTION

An enlarged vision and additional perspectives of public relations will be needed in the 21st Century: vision and perspectives that will not only complement, but that will challenge, existing paradigms. The reason will be simple, although the specifics are yet unknown. People will change because of presently unpredictable—but nevertheless certain--future communication technological phenomena that will require dramatic changes in public relations practitioners' efforts in relationship- and community-building. In fact, three major variables will affect future society in ways that will impact public relations practitioners' organizations: 1) globalism, 2) multiculturalism and 3) communication technology, the former two of which will be greatly influenced by the latter. Public relations practitioners will need new knowledge, strategies and tactics and undoubtedly will have to embrace additional paradigms to assure mutually beneficial relationships between their organizations and those organizations' stakeholders in a world that will be far different than that of even the latter part of the 20th Century.

Future communication technology will dramatically affect *all* areas of life and *all* types of relationships. Sclove (1995) concludes that technologies represent more than tools; they are also an important kind of social structure that help define and regulate social life (p. 89). Communication technology will affect society in ways that will be unprecedented, perhaps having even more pronounced impact than that of the alphabet and the printing press.

While some changes will undoubtedly be beneficial, other societal changes will likely prove detrimental to people's well-being. Many societal changes resulting from new communication technology will have effects that will go unexamined and perhaps be misunderstood for considerable lengths of time. Public relations practitioners will have to understand this technology, how to use it, how not to misuse it and how it affects their organizations and their organizations' stakeholders--as well as society at large.

Furthermore, communication technology will affect not only relationships, but also mass culture in ways that will further challenge public relations practitioners to seek adaptation and/or reconciliation between their organizations and new cultural norms. Simply, public relations practitioners must negotiate relationships with stakeholders not only in different ways and using different media, but these stakeholders will be comprised of people who will be fundamentally different than people of today because of the way communication technology will have fundamentally changed them. Virtually all relationship-building efforts with stakeholders will be affected.

Robins and Levidow (1995) say that virtual culture raises questions about who and what we are, confusing the technological and the organic, the inner and the outer realms, simulation and reality, freedom and control (p. 105). Besser (1995) says on-line access to culture will affect how people view culture, itself--creating a leveling effect that will confuse representations with the original objects that they represent. (p. 67). Harris (1995) observes with pessimism:

In the alienating world of office automation, the antidote to incomprehension is not education but a new kind of opium of the people, the ruse of "friendliness," whose gimmicks bring computers down to our level and encourage us to *forget* our ignorance rather than to overcome it ... It is one of the major paradoxes of the business world that the more we lose control over our appliances, the more control we are deceived into believing we exercise over them, so that our ignorance of the abstruse secrets of transistors and circuit boards stands in an inverse relation to our growing sense of mastery. (p. 199)

The journey into cyberspace will begin in the schools, Neill says (1995). Computerized education will prepare students for their lives of work, and the computer will also be used to shape students' personalities to accommodate the workplace:

Part of the information-technology agenda is to learn how better to control the thinking of humans. ... (S)chools will try to do what they have always tried to do, shape students into workers, but the more subtle strategy is to make the mind *want* to be computerized. (p. 190)

Furthermore, says Neill (1995), computerization of schools will not contribute to good jobs for these students (pp. 184-185). Rather, computers in schools will fit the economy and "the race to the bottom" for students whose instruction will not bring high wages (p. 188). A plethora of computer-trained students will result in low pay for technical work that anyone can do. Brook and Boal (1995) see automation in the name of progress and any "inevitable" technological change as benefiting the same class of people that forced people into factories. They argue that "labor-saving" devices have not so much reduced labor as they have increased profits and have refined class domination (pp. vii-viii). And people's "cyberselves" will arguably lack any institutional context. Bellah et al. (1991) say that, because institutions mediate relations between self and the world, meeting another person without an institutional context creates personal feelings of anxiety and possibly fear (p. 287).

PUBLIC RELATIONS' USE OF COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Be that as it may, computers and other mind-boggling communication technology are here to stay, proceeding rapidly in incomprehensible directions that it is difficult, if not impossible, to predict. This technology is neither good nor evil, and it can facilitate public relations efforts in ways that must be appreciated by even the most confirmed Luddite. There is no question that public relations practitioners must use this communication technology, not futilely resist it. But practitioners must use it in considered and deliberated ways, and they must sufficiently appreciate the changes in humankind that are resulting from this technology.

This future promises paradoxes: people will be both more free than ever before, but also perhaps more enslaved. They may be more homogenized, but they may become even more fragmented. Bell (1988) says problems of color, tribalism and ethnic differences present an agenda that sociology is ill-prepared to understand, least of all Marxism--perhaps making irrelevant even Weber and Durkheim (p. 441). Institutions will change, some perhaps obsolete. Bellah et al. (1991) remind that institutions are essential bearers of ideals and meanings (p. 40). Nation-states will remain indispensable for newly emerging international institutions, but they will become less autonomous and self-legitimizing (Bellah et al., p. 249).

Public relations practitioners must use new means of communication not for control, power and persuasion—as historically has been the case in developed countries, what Carey (1989) calls the United States' almost exclusive policy of improving communication over long distance as a form of power and transmission (p. 156). Rather, increasingly important will be public relations practitioners' attempts to foster "ritual" communication, i.e., a process through which a shared culture is created, modified and transformed.

A ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but the maintenance of society in time (even if some find this maintenance characterized by domination and therefore illegitimate); not the act of imparting information or influence but the recreation, representation, and celebration of shared even if illusory beliefs. If a transmission view of communication centers on the extension of messages across geography for purposes of control, a ritual view centers on the sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality (p. 43)

Such "ritual" communication will be increasingly important for people living in a time of great change. This type of communication is critically important for all relationship- and community-building; public relations practitioners in particular must adopt this view in their attempts to build and to maintain their organizations' relationships with their stakeholders--seeking communication technology that can foster and enhance "ritual" communication.

Brody (1990) observes that demassification and audience fragmentation have brought three monumental problems for contemporary communicators:

First, audiences are becoming less trusting and more skeptical. They are more and more predisposed by education and experience to test rather than readily accept new concepts, services, or products. Second, audiences are growing more difficult to reach with mediated messages. Target group members increasingly have less time available and commit their time more selectively to still-growing numbers of information delivery channels. Third, and most important, the pace of change continues to accelerate. (p. 2).

Communication technology applied to "ritual" communication can do much to ameliorate such problems identified by Brody. Transmission models of communication will not do so; such models do not lend themselves to relationship- and community-building.

SOCIAL SCIENCE PARADIGMS FOR PRACTITIONERS

Today's well-educated public relations practitioners have most often been trained as logical positivists. This is a legacy of American universities where social scientists have adopted a positivist model for research that uses experimental methods. The American "research university" began in the last decades of the 19th Century as a response to the emergence of the cultural paradigm of scientific knowledge in German universities and the new relationship between science and industry (Bellah et al., p. 154).

Stephen (1995) notes:

With this model of inquiry, historical influences were easily overlooked because they have no opportunity to display their effects in a laboratory or field study. Typically, communication research relied on cross-sectional designs, focusing almost exclusively on the location of immediate rather than ultimate causes. It was therefore virtually impossible to take account of the effects of broad-span historical processes ... (p. 6)

Stephen (1995) says the end of the Cold War has reawakened awareness of historical processes in world conflict at approximately the same time as the fall from preeminence of the positivist position in social science (p. 6). While empirical studies using logical positivist methodologies will remain important in public relations research, additional value will result from public relations practitioners' knowledge and use of cultural studies. Carey (1989) notes positivists' desire to maintain a distinction between "hard" science and "soft" scholarship, between knowledge and opinion (p. 99). However, he says:

Cultural studies ... does not seek to explain human behavior in terms of the laws that govern it or to dissolve it into the structures that underlie it; rather, it seeks to understand it. Cultural studies does not attempt to predict human behavior; rather, it attempts to diagnose human meanings. It is, more

positively, an attempt to bypass the rather abstracted empiricism of behavioral studies and the ethereal apparatus of formal theories and to descend deeper into the empirical world. The goals of communications conceived as a cultural science are therefore more modest but also more human, at least in the sense of attempting to be truer to human nature and experience as it ordinarily is encountered. (p. 56)

For public relations practitioners of the future, cultural studies may not determine applicable behavioral laws or structures, but will help contextualize meaning—to provide understanding. Cultural studies historically have gone unappreciated among many communication scholars who teach their students only the empirical social-scientific research methodologies of logical positivism. This is a mistake now, and ignoring cultural studies will be an even bigger mistake in the future.

CONCLUSION

An enlarged vision and additional perspectives of public relations will be needed in the 21st Century that will not only complement, but that will challenge, existing paradigms. Public relations practitioners will need new knowledge, new strategies and tactics and as well as additional paradigms because communication technology will dramatically affect all areas of life in ways yet unknown. Communication technology will affect not only relationships, but also mass culture in ways that will further challenge public relations practitioners to help adapt their organizations to new cultural norms.

Public relations practitioners must use new means of communication not for control, power and persuasion; rather, increasingly important will be public relations practitioners' attempts to foster "ritual" communication, i.e., a process through which a shared culture is created, modified and transformed.

Also, while empirical studies using logical positivist methodologies will undoubtedly remain important in public relations research, real value will be added from public relations practitioners' knowledge of cultural studies that will help contextualize meaning—to provide understanding.

REFERENCES

- Daniel Bell, D. (1988). *The end of ideology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S. M. (1991). *The good society*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Besser, H. (1995). From Internet to information superhighway. In J. Brook & I. A. Boal (Eds.), *Resisting the virtual life: The culture and politics of information* (pp. 59-70). San Francisco: City Lights.
- Brody, E.W. (1990). *Communication tomorrow: New audiences, new technologies, new media*. New York: Praeger.
- Carey, J. W. (1989). *Communication as culture: Essays on media and society*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.
- Harris, D. (1995). The aesthetic of the computer. In J. Brook & I. A. Boal (Eds.), *Resisting the virtual life: The culture and politics of information* (pp. 195-203). San Francisco: City Lights.
- Brook, J., & Boal, I. A. (1995). Preface. In J. Brook & I. A. Boal (Eds.), *Resisting the virtual life: The culture and politics of information* (pp. vii-xv). San Francisco: City Lights.
- Neill, M. (1995). Computers, thinking, and schools in the "New World Economic Order". In J. Brook & I. A. Boal (Eds.), *Resisting the virtual life: The culture and politics of information* (pp. 181-194). San Francisco: City Lights.
- Robins, K., & Levidow, L. (1995). Soldier, cyborg, citizen. In J. Brook & I. A. Boal (Eds.), *Resisting the virtual life: The culture and politics of information* (pp. 105-115). San Francisco: City Lights.
- Sclove, R. E. (1995). Making technology democratic. In J. Brook & I. A. Boal (Eds.), *Resisting the virtual life: The culture and politics of information* (pp. 85-101). San Francisco: City Lights.

Stephen, T. (1995). Interpersonal communication, history, and intercultural coherence. In F. L. Casmir (Ed.), *Communication in Eastern Europe: The role of history, culture, and media in contemporary conflicts* (pp. 5-25). Yaweh, NJ: Lawrence Album Associates, Publishers.